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Tenth meeting of chairpersons
of the human rights treaty bodies
Geneva, 14-18 September 1998

PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND ANNOTATIONS

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The tenth meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies will be held from 14 to 18 September 1998, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/178 of 23 December 1994, in which the Secretary-General was requested to finance, as of 1995, annual meetings of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies. Prior to their meeting in 1995, the chairpersons had met for the first time in 1984 and biannually from 1988 until 1994.

2. The present document, which was prepared in consultation with the Chairperson of the eighth and ninth meetings, contains the provisional agenda for the tenth meeting of chairpersons, together with annotations relating thereto.

GE.98-17385 (E)

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting and election of officers.

2. Adoption of the agenda.

3. Organizational and other matters.

4. Review of recent developments relating to the work of the treaty bodies.

5. Cooperation of human rights treaty bodies with United Nations specialized agencies, funds, programmes and mechanisms.

6. Universal ratification.

7. Improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies.

8. Servicing of the treaty bodies.

9. Reservations to the human rights treaties.

10. Gender perspectives in the work of the treaty bodies.

11. Assistance to small developing States.

12. Information technology.

13. Adoption of report.

ANNOTATIONS TO THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Item 1. Opening of the meeting and election of officers

The meeting will convene at the United Nations office at Geneva on Monday, 14 September 1998, at 10 a.m.

Item 2. Adoption of the agenda

The meeting will adopt its agenda on the basis of the provisional agenda contained in the present document.

Item 3. Organizational and other matters

Under this agenda item, the meeting will consider and adopt a programme of work.

Item 4. Review of recent developments relating to the work of the treaty bodies

The following representatives of extra-conventional human rights procedures and political organs have been invited to attend the meeting and address the chairpersons on the relationship between the work of the treaty bodies and the mechanisms which they represent: Ms. Mona Rishmawi, Chairperson of the fifth meeting of special rapporteurs/representatives, experts and chairpersons of working groups, H.E. Mr. Jacob Selebi, Chairman of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights, and Mr. El-Hadji Guissé, Chairman of the fiftieth session of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

As in the past, the chairpersons may wish to present briefly the activities of the treaty body they represent, as well as its working methods, new developments or decisions and challenges. Pursuant to a recommendation adopted at their eighth meeting (see A/52/507), para. 73), the chairpersons will have before them an "activities profile" for each committee describing the salient activities of each committee over the past year and including relevant statistics.

Item 5. Cooperation of human rights treaty bodies with United Nations specialized agencies, funds, programmes and mechanisms

In accordance with previous practice, United Nations specialized agencies, funds, programmes and mechanisms whose mandate is closely related to the work of the treaty bodies have been invited to be represented at the meeting to exchange views on matters of mutual interest or concern. Additionally, the chairpersons will be briefed by the secretariat on developments in the relations between the Office of the High commissioner for Human Rights and its partner agencies in the United Nations system, particularly on a recently concluded memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

Item 6. Universal ratification

The chairpersons may also wish to discuss questions relating to universal ratification of the core international human rights treaties. At their eighth meeting the chairpersons requested the Office of the High Commissioner to engage in consultations with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to explore the contributions those agencies might make to encouraging and assisting Governments to ratify. The Secretary-General was requested to provide a written report on progress made with those initiatives to the ninth meeting of chairpersons. The chairpersons will have before them the information requested in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the effectiveness of the human rights treaty bodies (HRI/MC/1998/4).

Item 7. Improving the operation of the human rights treaty bodies

Under this item, the chairpersons may wish to discuss the question of focused reports. At their ninth meeting, the chairpersons reiterated the view that in relation to periodic reports there are significant advantages in seeking ways by which to focus the report of each State party on a limited range of issues, which might be identified by each committee in advance of the preparation of the report by the State concerned, and decided to revert to this matter at their tenth meeting.

The chairpersons may also wish to consider how to give effect to their proposal (see A/52/507, para. 51) that occasional sessions be held at the various United Nations regional offices in light of the specific information on this matter which the Secretary-General was requested to make available to the tenth meeting. Information relevant to this proposal is contained in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the effectiveness of the human rights treaty bodies (HRI/MC/1998/4).

At their eighth and ninth meetings, the chairpersons proposed a major new programme to provide training to interested parties, especially at the national level; recommended that an inventory of such training programmes be prepared; recommended exploring the possibility of exploiting electronic means of providing target audiences with training materials and information; and suggested that technical briefings be arranged for treaty body members (see A/52/507, paras. 47-48; ninth meeting report A/53/125, paras. 37-39). The chairpersons will be briefed by the secretariat on developments in these areas.

The chairpersons also requested that sample dossiers be compiled of the press coverage of the various treaty bodies so that the treaty bodies might gain a better appreciation of what was involved and what could be achieved (see A/52/507, para. 70). Such dossiers, prepared by the United Nations Information Service, will be made available to the chairpersons.

The chairpersons will also have before them the report of the Secretary-General on the status of the international human rights instruments and the general situation of overdue reports (HRI/MC/1998/5) and

General Assembly resolution 52/118 on effective implementation of international instruments on human rights, including reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights.

Item 8. Servicing of the treaty bodies

At their eighth and ninth meetings, the chairpersons expressed their concern at the inadequate staffing situation and placed particular emphasis upon the backlog in processing communications. The chairpersons will be briefed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on plans to remedy the situation. In this context, the chairpersons may wish to review the Plans of Action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In addition to the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General (HRI/MC/1998/4), the chairpersons will be briefed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of the two Plans.

In addition, the chairpersons will have before them a draft Global Plan of Action (HRI/MC/1998/Misc.1) to strengthen the implementation of the international human rights treaties, prepared by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in consultation with the chairpersons of the eighth and ninth meetings of chairpersons pursuant to a recommendation contained in the report of the ninth meeting. The draft Global Plan of Action addresses the support requirements of the five Geneva-based treaty monitoring bodies.

Item 9. Reservations to the human rights treaties

The chairpersons may wish to continue their discussion of the preliminary conclusions adopted by the International Law Commission at its forty-seventh session relating to reservations to normative multilateral treaties, including human rights treaties. The views of the chairpersons have been solicited by the Chairperson of the forty-ninth session of the International Law Commission and its Special Rapporteur on reservations to treaties, as well as by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. The chairpersons will have before them those preliminary conclusions, as well as resolution 1997/41 of the Sub-Commission.

Item 10. Gender perspectives in the work of the treaty bodies

At their eighth meeting, the chairpersons invited the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat to prepare a background paper analysing what the various treaty bodies had done, and should do, in integrating gender perspectives into their work. The chairpersons may wish to discuss that background paper under this agenda item (HRI/MC/1998/6).

Item 11. Assistance to small developing States

The chairpersons recommended at their ninth meeting that ways be explored to enable treaty bodies to examine reports by small developing States by means of a videoconference link between the committee room and the national

capital. They requested that a report on this possibility be sought from the appropriate Secretariat service for their tenth meeting. That report will be made available in document HRI/MC/1998/Misc.2.

Item 12. Information technology

The chairpersons at their eighth meeting warmly welcomed the rapid development over the past year of the Website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and urged the High Commissioner to attach high priority to the further development of this resource. Advances have continued to be made in relation not only to the Website but also to other information technology systems in the Office of the High Commissioner. They also called for the Manual on Human Rights Reporting to be made available on the Website. Information is contained in the report of the Secretary-General (HRI/MC/1998/4) and a briefing will be provided by the secretariat on the improvements envisioned for the coming year.

Item 13. Adoption of report

At the end of the meeting, the chairpersons will adopt a report on their meeting, including conclusions and recommendations, which will be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.